DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 452 501 CS 014 364

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TITLE The Reading Tutor.
PUB DATE 2001-00-00
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Course Descriptions; Higher Education; *Reading Instruction; Reading Programs; *Tutorial Programs; *Tutoring
IDENTIFIERS America Reads Challenge

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ED 452 501

# The Reading Tutor

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## ABSTRACT

As a direct result of the passage of the America Reads Challenge Act in 1997, Mt. Mercy College, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has developed a reading tutor program. The program includes a college credit course and on-site visits by college faculty supervising student tutors.

This article includes the rationale for development of a credit course for reading tutors and a description of the components included in the reading tutor course. Copies of the course syllabus and samples of activities used by tutors in working with children are included.

## The Reading Tutor

### Setting up a Program

In 1997 Congress passed the America Reads Challenge Act to provide support to schools for the improvement and enhancement of reading programs. This act provided funds to hire reading specialists and tutor coordinators to train and organize volunteers to tutor children in reading. In addition, federal work-study funds could be used to hire college and university students to tutor elementary students in reading.

Beginning in the1998-99 academic year Mount Mercy College implemented a "tutoring program" utilizing federal work-study funds. Students were hired to tutor in area schools and most spent five to seven hours a week working with individuals and small groups. They were given some guidance by in-service teachers and by education faculty at the college, but there was no formal training for these tutors.

During the 1999-2000 school year education faculty met to discuss some concerns about the lack of training for tutors. We decided to offer a course for credit open to all college students on strategies and ways to assist children who are having difficulties in reading. This course was first implemented during the Fall 2000 semester.

All college faculty were sent a memo with a description of the course as well as a brief summary of the federal initiative and the benefits available to students wishing to earn work-study monies while tutoring in the schools. We felt it to be important to make the whole faculty aware of this program since we wanted it to be open to students throughout the college. The course was listed in the course schedule and a description of the course was placed in the college catalog. (See syllabus in Appendix A.)

Since "Reading Tutor" is open to all students beginning at the Freshman level, the course must provide a basic introduction to literacy as well as teach techniques/strategies for helping children to become successful readers and writers.

Weekly sessions were scheduled. At these sessions instructors modeled lesson planning, effective teaching strategies, and ways to assess individual learners.

Several schools were targeted to receive reading tutors. Principals agreed to assign students to teachers who would select one or two individuals who could benefit from one-on-one assistance. We asked teachers to allow students to work with one or two children rather than a group of pupils because we felt that they would be more successful in a one-on-one format. It is critical that teachers understand that the reading tutors are to work with individuals, helping them to be successful in reading, rather than utilizing them to run off copies of materials or doing other clerical work.

Students received their tutoring placement on the first day of class as well as a letter and guidelines for the cooperating teacher. Students were informed that a college faculty member would be visiting the classroom periodically and would also be available if the student had any questions or concerns.

**Components in a Reading Tutor Course**

There are several important components to consider when planning a course to train tutors. These would include:

- *Working in the community*
- *Developing a rapport with the child*
- *Evaluating the child*
- *Planning lessons*

- *Supportive reading strategies*
- *Developing resource materials*
- *Continuing a positive relationship with the child.*

*Working in the Community*

Before beginning placement in a school in the community, students need to be given an overview of their responsibilities. They need to establish a regular schedule with the teacher or volunteer coordinator. This schedule should be agreed upon by all and it needs to be realistic. If they commit to certain days and times, they need to be there.

Students have a responsibility to be positive and productive. They need to carefully plan, implement, and evaluate tutoring sessions to make sure that they are making good use of their time. They need to work cooperatively with the teacher and/or coordinator to help the child to be as successful as possible.

The college faculty member, who is the reading tutor instructor, must make students aware of their responsibilities, but the instructor should also make it apparent that he/she is willing to work closely with the tutor in planning appropriate lessons and in providing feedback regarding lessons. When possible, the college faculty member should visit the classroom to observe the teaching situation. In some instances it may be appropriate to model some sessions for the tutor.

*Developing a Rapport with the Child*

It is important that the tutor develop a good rapport with the child before actual instruction begins. The child needs to feel comfortable with the tutor, and it should be a positive learning experience. The tutor may begin by talking to the child about his/her

interests. Sometimes an interest survey may be helpful, but usually an informal discussion is sufficient. In getting to know the child, the tutor should also share some of his/her likes and dislikes.

The tutor should have one or two favorite stories to read. If desired the tutor can let the student choose which story he would like to hear. Before reading to the child, the tutor should practice reading the story out loud, so he can read it with enthusiasm. Have the child sit beside you so that he can see the pictures and you can briefly talk about what is happening in the story when appropriate. At this time, the tutor may also want to introduce a journal activity. The journal will be used by the child to write down stories, happenings, and questions.

Before ending this initial session, the tutor may want to discuss different genres with the child. Ask what types of stories the child enjoys. Then ask the child to please bring a favorite book that he/she would like to read next time. If appropriate, the child could also bring a writing sample to share.

*Evaluating the Child*

During the second or third session, the tutor may want to do an informal reading inventory. There are several different formats available. Most Informal Reading Inventories include a word list to determine reading level and several reading passages at different levels with follow-up questions to determine comprehension level. The inventory should be done after the child feels comfortable with the tutor. The child reads a story and the tutor notes miscues and fluency during the reading. After completing the story four or five comprehension questions are used to determine understanding of the material. Several stories are used in this manner to determine reading level.

When working with young children or children who have difficulty in reading, the tutor may want to do a running record. Tutors need to be trained to use this technique. If this is not possible in the time period available, the instructor or a reading specialist may do the evaluation to determine the child's reading level.

*Planning Lessons*

Tutors need to carefully plan lessons before each tutoring session. Instructors can facilitate this by providing a simple lesson plan format. Following is a sample lesson plan:

Tutoring Lesson Plan

**Chat:** Informally talk to the child about his day or interests before beginning the lesson.

**Read Aloud:** Tutor selects a book or chapter to read aloud to the student. (This need not be done with every lesson, but it is a good way to model fluency for the child.) The teacher read aloud can be alternated with the child choosing an easy book to read aloud to the tutor.

**Introduce New Book:** The tutor decides on the best way to introduce the book and gives specific examples. One example would be to introduce key vocabulary words to make sure that the child has the necessary background knowledge to read the book. Another way would be to do a simple "text walk" where the child and the tutor look at the pictures and a few key words on some of the pages in the story. The tutor may also model a reading strategy such as using picture and context cues.

**Mini Lesson:** Here the tutor describes the focus of the mini lesson, gives specific examples, and includes any games or flashcards to be used.

**Writing Activity:** The writing activity is described and samples of the student's work may be included. Brainstorming or story mapping may be one activity presented before the child begins to write.

**Reflection:** Describe what part of the lesson went well and why it was successful. Also discuss what part of the lesson you might do differently and why. Discuss what you learned about the child"" reading strategies and what you might work on during the next session.

*Supportive Reading Strategies*

Tutors need to be aware of a variety of reading strategies to enable them to assist the struggling reader. Initially tutors need to understand the three cueing systems that reside in print (O'Donnell & Wood, 2000). These are "graphophonic, syntactic, and semantic." Once these cueing systems are understood, specific reading strategies can be demonstrated by the instructor.

There are many activities and learning games that can be used to demonstrate how to use graphophonic cues. Some of these activities have been compiled by Cunningham and can be found in *Phonics They Use* (Cunningham, 2000). A few activities/games the author has found particularly useful are included in Appendix B.

One way to teach syntactic cues is to read books that use patterns and repetition. Sentence structure and patterns can be discussed as the child reads the book. Two books that lend themselves to this type of activity are *Brown Bear, Brown, Bear What Do You See?* (Martin, 1967 and *Cookie's Week* (Ward, 1988). Children need to become familiar with many books that contain these patterns to help them to become more fluent readers.

Semantic or context cues are used by all good readers. Tutors can help children to use these cues by providing highly predictable materials and by asking questions to encourage students to construct meaning from print. The instructor can model strategies for making use of context cues. Use a predictable book such as *Mrs. Wishy Washy* (Cowley, 1980). Read part of the story to the tutors and then use the "cloze technique" for several key words. In this technique several key words ore omitted in the story and the children fill is the words.

*Developing Resources and Materials*

Although the classroom teacher may have games and materials to use, the tutor should also have a supply of resources and materials. These activities can be developed during the tutoring course. The college faculty member should supply a variety of patterns and materials for the tutor to use in making games. (See Appendix B.)

Simple materials such as index cards and markers can be used to make flash cards to accompany books at the instructional level. Oak tag can be utilized to make sentence strips for sequencing in story format, or words in a sentence can be cut apart and then put in order. Oak tag folders make great game boards. These can be used for multiple purposes.

After a child writes a short story, the tutor can put it in book format for the child to read and enjoy. The child may wish to illustrate it or use pictures from a magazine to enhance the story. At times the child and the tutor may write a story together based on a common experience or on a book that they have just completed.

*Continuing a Positive Relationship with the Child*

Often a struggling reader will get discouraged when he/she continues to have difficulty with the text. All lessons should begin with an easy book that the child can read successfully. As the child makes progress, the tutor will need to point out the number of new words and books that the child can now read. It is ok for the child to read the same book several times until he/she becomes very familiar with the text and can read fluently. Many times children who are being tutored have not had much success with reading. It is critical that the tutor give the child many opportunities for success.

After the child reads the easy book, the tutor introduces a book that is a little more challenging. This is where it is important to make sure that it is a good match for the child. Leveled books are helpful, but it is also good to choose a book where the child has some background information. The tutor can make sure that the child is familiar with the topic and format of the book. Background information should be provided when needed and difficult words and concepts should be discussed before reading. For example, if the child is reading a story about fruits that they have not seen or tasted, the tutor might bring in the fruit(s) for the child to taste.

The tutor needs to continue to provide positive feedback and to reinforce the child. If a child reads a difficult word or section, the tutor may ask "How were you able to figure out what that said?" Reinforce strategies that the child effectively utilizes. This will enable the child to become an independent reader and to feel confident about his/her reading ability.

**Concluding Ideas**

There are a variety of books available for volunteer tutors. One helpful book is *Tips for the Reading Team: Strategies for Tutors* (Walker and Morrow, editors, 1998).

The text includes many useful suggestions for ways to read aloud to children including read aloud strategies to use with students who have English as a second language. It also includes techniques to help children to decode effectively and to read more fluently.

After working with students in our tutoring program, I find that it is beneficial for both the tutor and the child being assisted. I find that the tutors are really excited and pleased when they see the progress that their students have made, and the children really benefit from this one-on-one experience. The tutor and the child gain confidence in their abilities. Tutors realize that they can help someone to become a better reader and the children being assisted gain valuable skills that will lead to more independent reading and hopefully to a love of reading.

## Bibliography


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Cunningham, P.M. (2000). *Phonics They Use.* New York: Longman.

Elkonin, D.B. (1973). Reading in the U.S.S.R. in J. Downing (Ed.), *Comparative Reading* (pp. 551-579). New York: Macmillan.

Martin, B. Jr. (1967). *Brown Bear, Brown Bear, What Do You See?* New York: Henry Holt.

O'Donnell, M.P. & Wood, M. (1999 2nd ed.). *Becoming a Reader.* Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Walker, B.J. & Morrow, L.M. (Eds.) (1998). *Tips for the Reading Team: Strategies for Tutors.* Newark: International Reading Association.

Ward, C. (1988). *Cookie's Week.* New York: Scholastic Inc.

## Appendix A

Mount Mercy College

# Division of Education Syllabus

**Course:** ED 430 Special Topics: Reading Tutor

**Professor:** Merilee Rosberg 313 Warde Hall ext. 1295

**Term:** Spring 2001
Tuesday – 2:00-3:20

**Text:** Schumm, J.S. & Schumm., G.E. (1998), *The Reading Tutor's Handbook: A Common Sense Guide to Helping Students Read and Write.* Minneapolis, MN: Free Spirit Publishing.

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**Course Description:**

This course is designed for individuals with little or no experience in teaching reading or writing but who have a strong desire to help others become literate. This one-hour course is designed for people who want to help. It provides students with an opportunity to tutor in a school setting. As part of a federal literacy initiative, it may be possible to receive work-study funding to act as a tutor. Please contact the course instructor(s) for more information.

**Course Objectives**

The student will:

- develop a basic understanding of literacy and the stages of literacy
- develop skills to motivate and support students
- develop skills to work successfully with teachers and support personnel
- evaluate and utilize reading resources
- understand and utilize a variety of reading strategies in working with students
- understand and utilize a variety of evaluation techniques in planning lessons for individual pupils
- develop the ability to write lesson plans for individuals and small reading groups
- create several literacy games/activities to use with your student

**Student Responsibilities:**

As a tutor/participant in this course, you will:

- have the responsibility to be there when you have agreed to do so
- have the responsibility to get to know the student, and especially his/her strengths and challenges as a reader. To assist you in doing this you will need to:
  a. analyze your own reading experience to develop a frame of reference
  b. develop a rationale for your approach to the tutoring experience
- have the responsibility to support and encourage your students
- have the responsibility to plan, implement and evaluate tutoring sessions
- have the responsibility to communicate in positive and productive ways with parents, teachers and other staff as appropriate

**Participation and Attendance:**

You have the responsibility to be there at agreed upon time! Your interaction as tutor may well be the highlight of the student's day. Your failure to regularly meet this obligation can add to the problems already being confronted by the student. Attendance at scheduled seminars is required. You must report any necessary absence prior to the seminar session. Your active participation in the seminar session is a

key to your growth as a tutor. As instructors, we cannot be present at each of your tutoring sessions. It is in seminar and through your assignments, submitted and discussed in those sessions, that you will demonstrate and share what you have learned.

**Assignments:**

1. Weekly lesson plans will be submitted before use in your tutoring placement. Plans will be shared in the seminar sessions with your instructors and your colleagues. 50% of your grade in this course will be based upon your lesson plans.
2. You will develop a brief case study, including an interview, one type of assessment, and lesson plans for your student. (You and your cooperating teacher will choose a student who needs one-on-one assistance with reading.) 30% of your grade in this course will be based upon your case study.
3. Participation in scheduled seminars is required. 20% of your course grade will be based upon attendance and participation.

**Seminar Agenda:**

| Date | Topic | Reading Assignment |
|---|---|---|
| Feb. 6 | Working in the Community | Chapters 1 & 2 in Handbook |
| Feb. 13 | Meeting with your new student | Chapters 3, 4, 5 in Handbook |
| Feb. 20 | Supportive Reading Strategies | Chapters 6 & 7 in Handbook |
| Feb. 27 | Developing Resource Materials (technology tips and practices) | Chapters 8 & 9 in Handbook |
| March 6 | Individual Case Studies | Handout materials |
| March 13 | Evaluating and Troubleshooting | Chapter 10 in Handbook |
| April 3 | More Supportive Strategies | Handout materials |
| April 10 | Share Experiences and Case Studies | |
| May 8 | Success Stories and Evaluation | |

| Activity | Points Awarded |
|---|---|
| Lesson Plans | 50 |
| Case Study | 30 |
| Attendance at and Participation in Seminar | 20 |

**Grading Scale:**

| | |
|---|---|
| A | 93-100% |
| A- | 90-92% |
| B+ | 87-89% |
| B | 83-86% |
| B- | 80-82% |
| C+ | 77-79% |
| C | 73-76% |
| C- | 70-72% |
| D+ | 67-69% |
| D | 63-66% |
| D- | 60-62% |
| F | 59& or less |

Additional Resources for Reading Tutors

Clay, Marie M. (1993). Reading Recovery. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Cunningham, Patricia M. and Dorothy P. Hall. (1994). Making Big Words. Parsippany, NJ: Good Apple, Inc.

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Herrmann, Beth Ann (ed.). (1994). The Volunteer Tutor's Toolbox. Newark: International Reading Association.

Mooney, Margaret E. (1990). Reading To, With, and By Children. New York: Richard C. Owen Publishers, Inc.

National Research Council. (1999). Starting Out Right. Washington, DC: National Academy Press.

Roller, Cathy M. (1998). So.What's a Tutor to Do?. Newark: International Reading Association.

Soderman, Anne K., Kara M. Gregory, and Louise T. O'Neill. (1999). Scaffolding Emergent Literacy. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Walker, Barbara J. and Lesley Mandel Morrow (ed.). (1998). Tips for the Reading Team. Newark: International Reading Association.

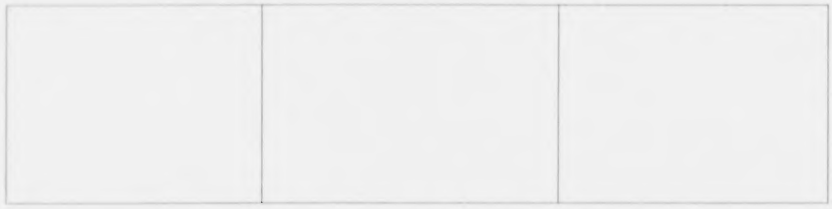
Appendix B

**Activities to Promote Graphaphonics**

**The following activities have been taken or adapted from *Phonics They Use* (Cunningham 2000).**

## Sound Boxes

Some children find it very difficult to segment words into sounds. Many teachers have found success using a technique called sound boxes (Elkonin, 1973), in which children push chips, pennies, or other objects into boxes as they hear the sounds. In the first lessons, children have a drawing of three boxes.



The teacher says familiar words composed of three sounds, such as *cat, sun, dog, pan.* After naming each object, the teacher and children "stretch out" the three sounds, distorting the word as little as possible: "sssuuunnn." Children push a chip into each box as they say that part of the word. It is important to note here that the boxes represent sounds- phonemes- not letters. *Cake, bike*, and *duck* have three sounds, but four letters. These words would be segmented into three sound boxes. Once children get good at segmenting words with three sounds, they are given a drawing with four boxes and they stretch out some four-phoneme words such as *truck, crash*, and *nest.*

Once children can push the chips to represent sounds, they can push letter cards into boxes. From the letters *m,b,s,t*, and *a*, the teacher could ask the children to push these letters to spell words such as *sat, bat, mat, bam, Sam, tab, bats, mats, tags,* and *stab.* Children should not work with letters in the sound boxes until they have developed some phonemic awareness and are working on learning letter names and letter sounds. Later

on, children can actually write the letters in the boxes as they are attempting to spell words they are writing. Try to use "pure" sounds- a word with just *f*, not *fr* or *fl*- since separating these blending sounds is difficult for children in the beginning.

### Making Words

This is an activity in which children are given some letters and use these letters to make words. They make little words and then bigger words until the final word is made. The final word always includes all the letters they have, and children are always eager to figure out what the word is that can be made from all the letters. Making words is a hands-on, manipulative activity in which children learn how to look for patterns in words and how changing just one letter or where you put a letter changes the whole word.

1. Give the child the letters needed.
2. Name the letters and have the child hold up the matching letter card.
3. Tell the child to take two letters and make the first word. Have them say the word after you, stretching out the word to hear all the sounds.
4. Continue to make words, giving the student clues such as "Change just the first letter" or "Move the same letters around and you can make a different word" or "Take all your letters out and make another word." Cue the child when (s)he needs to use more letters.
5. Before telling the child the last word, ask, "Have you figured out the secret word we can make with all our letters?" If so, congratulate the child and have him/her make it. Give the child clues, as needed, to help him/her figure out the big word.
6. Once all the words have been made, take the index cards on which you wrote the words and have the child say and spell the words with you. Pick a word and point out a particular spelling pattern – beginning letters, endings, related words, and rhymes. Ask the child to find the others with that same pattern. Line these words up so the pattern is visible.

### Folder Word Wall

Using a folder, develop a list of high-frequency words, ideally from the basal or word list being used in the child's class. Words are written on the folder alphabetically by first letter. Plan activities to practice using these words. Begin with a small number of words and gradually add about five words per week.

1. Talk about each new word and its unusual sounds/letters.
2. Compare it to another known word.
3. Chant the word and write it.
4. Talk about the meaning of the word.
5. Say the word in a sentence.
6. Write the word in a sentence.
7. When appropriate illustrate or dramatize the word.

### Be A Mind Reader

The tutor thinks of a word and gives five clues to that word.

1. It is one of the words in your word folder.
2. It has four letters.
3. It begins with th.
4. The vowel is an e.
5. It finishes the sentence "I gave my books to _____." (them)

### Folder Wheel of Fortune Game

The tutor selects a word and draws lines to represent the number of letters _ _ _ _ _.

The child selects letters for the word. When two or three letters are in the word, the child can begin to guess the word.

### Rhyming Words

The child numbers his/her paper from 1-5.

1. Number one begins with a T and rhymes with walk.
2. Number two begins with an M and rhymes with by.
3. Number three begins with an F and rhymes with fun.
4. Number four begins with an L and rhymes with bike.
5. Number five begins with a G and rhymes with stood.

Check the answers. The student responds with "talk" "my" "fun" "like" and "good"

Regularly activities of the sort listed above appear in *The Reading Teacher*, *Instructor*, and *Teaching Pre K-8*. Ideas abound in educational journals that can be readily adapted for tutorial or one-on-one use.